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SUBJECT: POPE BENEDICT XVI PONTIFICATE PREVIEW PART THREE

REF: A) VATICAN 0467; B) VATICAN 0468; C) VATICAN 0475; D) VATICAN 0479; E) VATICAN 0480

1.(U) This cable is the third in a series previewing the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI. The first cable (ref c) examined Benedict's election and initial impressions of the focus of his papacy. The second installment (ref d) examined approaches he is likely to take on major policy issues within the Church and internationally. This third cable examines the way that Pope Benedict XVI is likely to govern the Church and the dynamics of his management of the Curia.

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Summary  
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12. (SBU) Benedict XVI's closest collaborators have told us he is a humble, attentive listener who is open to arguments before making a judgment. According to his former colleagues in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, his formidable mind and desire for seeking the "truth" make him more open to discussion and debate than has usually been portrayed. A naturally quiet, shy, scholarly person, the pope has decided not to seek the spotlight as much as his predecessor, opting for less fanfare. He uses public occasions to speak more about the essentials of church life, offering headline-making comments on geo-political issues less often. The 78-year-old former stroke victim may also be trying to pace himself somewhat for health reasons, having seen how hard Pope John Paul II drove himself. German churchmen will likely be appointed to important positions in place of the Poles who held high places in John Paul II's pontificate, but there will be no "Deutsche mafia" in Benedict's pontificate. The pope will work on his first encyclical and further personnel moves this summer, likely affirming his desire for a pontificate with limited fanfare, focused on "faith and truth." End summary.

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Willingness to Listen  
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13. (SBU) Discussions with the new pope's colleagues on his management style have brought out an image in stark contrast to the media's depiction of Ratzinger as stern, imperious, and eager to squelch voices of dissent. Those who have worked with him have told us without exception that Benedict XVI is a humble, attentive listener, who is open to arguments before making a judgment. An American contact who worked in Ratzinger's dicastery for many years told us that when an issue came before the office in a staff meeting, the cardinal would ask for the opinion of the most junior person first, working his way up to his deputy. Ratzinger did not just want the group to hear what a senior prelate said and then parrot the response (a tactic, our contact admitted ruefully, not uncommon in the Vatican hierarchy). In fact, Ratzinger typically listened quietly to all opinions and then gave his decision - which was on not a few occasions in agreement with that of the junior member of the staff.

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Formidable Intellect  
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14. (SBU) Our contacts also remarked on Benedict's intellect, insisting that his formidable mind made him more open to discussion and debate than some might think. "He's not afraid to face tough questions, because he genuinely feels that he has thought them through. He constantly seeks the truth," one told us, "and he's willing to reevaluate judgments he had made that, upon later reflection, don't seem to be borne out by the facts." One example of this, he said, was the sexual abuse scandal in the U.S. Though Ratzinger said early in the crisis that the American media was blowing the situation out of proportion, he eventually concluded that, while the media may have been unfair to the Church or acting with a certain agenda, the crisis was all too real (ref d). Fr. Joseph "Gus" DiNoia, Ratzinger's second deputy at CDF, told us he was impressed by the cardinal's ability to digest multiple sources of

information on a certain subject during the course of a meeting or conference, often in many languages. In the end, he typically offered a distilled version of the subject, focusing accurately on the key issues at stake.

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A New Papal Style  
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5.(SBU) Benedict XVI has already brought his own style to the papacy. He has decided not to seek the spotlight as much as his predecessor, opting, for example, not to preside at beatification liturgies (the last step before canonization), ending a 34-year-old practice. Although the pope's presence at beatifications had become routine, Benedict (as Cardinal Ratzinger and head of the Holy See's doctrinal office) and others thought that such high-level participation had created misunderstandings among believers about the sainthood process. In his public addresses, Pope Benedict has opted to speak about the essentials of church life and less often about world issues that would generate headlines. Even his much-publicized address to Italian bishops referring to Italy's assisted procreation referendum avoided direct, simple formulations that would have made good media copy.

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Limited Engagements  
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16. (SBU) Benedict is meeting with fewer groups and giving fewer photo ops than did his predecessor. A photo with Pope John Paul had become for many a notch in the belt showing that they had really made it to the Vatican. After every Wednesday audience, a seemingly endless line of those lucky enough to get "prima fila" (first row) tickets was ushered up to shake the weary pope's hand or kiss his ring. At Benedict's public audiences, the pope simply walks out towards the faithful to greet them. The photos are kept to a minimum.

17. (SBU) For the time being - with rare exceptions - only heads of government and religious leaders are being granted private audiences with the new pope. On his first trip outside of Rome to the Italian church's Eucharistic Congress in Bari, Italy in late May, Benedict flew back to the Vatican immediately after the main gathering, eschewing the many meetings and photo ops with local Church officials, Eucharistic Congress participants and other dignitaries in which Pope John Paul would surely have taken part.

18. (SBU) The message of these changes is that Benedict is not seeking to be present to the public in the same way as John Paul II. He is seeking to de-emphasize the "rock star" image of the pope and return the papacy to its role in promoting the Catholic faith. He does not like to travel. In fact, after his last trip to the United States in 1999, he told an aid that it was the last time he would cross the Atlantic. While his recent promotion may force him to go back on this prediction, he will surely travel far less than his predecessor did.

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Pacing Himself  
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19. (SBU) The 78-year-old former stroke victim is also trying to pace himself, recognizing the limits of his age and having seen the negative effects of Pope John Paul's hectic schedule on his health. As an archbishop who is a close collaborator of the new pope put it to the Charge recently, Benedict "knows he's going to die on the job, but he'd prefer it to be later, rather than sooner." He has had to honor scheduling obligations made by Pope John Paul II, but has been careful not to make too many of his own. "He knows he can add on to his schedule later if he wants to," the archbishop said. "But it's much harder to trim back a schedule once it's been made."

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Good-bye Poles  
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110. (SBU) As for the inner circle the pope will depend upon for counsel and to shield him from the masses demanding his time and attention, there will certainly be a change from the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. It didn't take long after John Paul's death for some in the Italian press to express their happiness at the exodus of the "Polish mafia" that they said had surrounded the first Slavic pope. Of course, many Poles in Curial positions will remain in place, but less official advisors and confidants such as John Paul's longtime secretary, Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz (the newly-named Archbishop of Krakow), and his friend Cardinal Andrzej Deskur now find themselves outside of the circle of power. Even well-established Curial Poles such as Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko (Pontifical Council for the Laity) and Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski (Congregation for Catholic Education) are likely to see their influence weaken. Still, we don't expect to see the Poles discarded wholesale. Benedict XVI has too much respect for John Paul to abandon all who were closest to him. One example is Ukrainian-born (but ethnically Polish -- from Lviv) papal secretary Monsignor Mieczyslaw Mokrzycki, whom Benedict plans to keep on in a top secretarial role.

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Hello Germans?  
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111. (SBU) Although Ratzinger's secretary, Monsignor Georg Ganswein, has joined his boss in the papal apartments, it seems unlikely that a German mafia will move in to supplant the exiting Poles. One German working in the Vatican brought up the issue to us without being asked. "Don't worry," he said. "There will be no 'German mafia.' We just don't have it. It's not in our nature. We like rules and order. These types of informal cliques and relationships don't appeal to us." It is also true that the mindset of Poles coming into the Curia from a persecuted Church in the late 1970s or 1980s is markedly different from the mindset of Germans in 2005. And though there hasn't been a German pope since 1057, there have been several powerful Germans in the Curia in past decades. Germans have already become used to having their own as

influential churchmen in Rome. They are unlikely to move to consolidate their positions around a new pope as the Poles did.

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Comment  
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12. (SBU) When he appeared on the balcony of Saint Peter's Basilica for the first time, Pope Benedict proclaimed himself simply a "humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord." It seemed a tall order for him to follow the daunting legacy of Pope John Paul II. While historians will make their judgment of Benedict's pontificate many years from now, the new pope has taken to the papacy, as DiNoia told us, "like a fish to water," and seems to be genuinely enjoying his new role. The key to his success may well be his continued ability to "be his own pope" and ignore the giant fisherman's shoes he has inherited.

13.(SBU) The pope will take advantage of his summer holiday to prepare his first encyclical, giving a further indication of the direction of his papacy. He will also make some personnel decisions that will be announced in the fall. The encyclical and personnel moves will likely affirm Benedict's initial direction and his desire for a pontificate with limited fanfare, focused on "faith and truth."

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